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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000356

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DEPT FOR DS/IP/AF, DS/IP/ITA, DS/DSS/OSAC, S/CT, D, P, M, INR,
CA, AF/S; GABORONE FOR RSO

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PTER](#) [CASC](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [LT](#)

SUBJECT: LESOTHO: EAC ASSESSES GOL CURFEW, SECURITY DETERIORATION

REF: A) MASERU 355; B) MASERU 351 AND PREVIOUS

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CLASSIFIED BY: Charge d'Affaires a.i. W. Patrick Murphy, CDA
a.i., EXEC, DOS.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (c), (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Charge convened the EAC twice on June 18 to assess mission security policies and potential threats following the GOL's after hours announcement on June 15 of a daily curfew, several violent security incidents over the weekend of June 16-17 (including the carjacking of a U.S. mission vehicle), and an assessment by the GOL that recent armed attacks are the work of renegade military and police personnel seeking to overthrow the government. The EAC agreed that several tripwires had been at least partially crossed, and recommended specific security actions. Post characterizes the current political and security climate as stable but increasingly tense. Maseru is business as usual during daylight; the public and commercial sectors are at regular operations during non-curfew hours. Maseru is shuttered at nightfall, however, and the city takes on an eerie calm, punctuated by occasional gunfire and reports of violent security incidents. There are no reports of Amcits facing security difficulties. END SUMMARY.

9:00 a.m. Emergency Action Committee Meeting

12. (C) On Monday, June 18, Embassy Maseru's EAC convened to review post's security posture in light of weekend developments following the GOL's imposition on June 15 of a 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. daily curfew in Maseru and at least some upcountry cities (ref A). Charge, Peace Corps Director, Peace Corps Regional Security Officer, GSO (acting PSO), Consul, P/DEP Officer, IMO, Management Assistant, and CLO participated. The EAC reviewed the following developments:

- Lesotho's Police Commissioner, contacted by Charge on the evening of Friday, June 15, acknowledged late evening radio reports that the GOL had imposed a comprehensive curfew as a means of apprehending "criminals" responsible for recent attacks on senior government and political figures (ref B). She noted that enforcement would be "flexible" the first night of the curfew, given the late notice, but that security officials would strictly enforce the measure during subsequent days.
- A/PSO implemented the post's phone tree after hours on June 15 to advise all mission personnel of the new curfew.
- A/PSO reactivated the phone tree on June 16, following overnight reports of harassment of local residents at security checkpoints, and issued a security directive to direct all mission personnel to adhere to the curfew and to take precautionary security measures.
- CONS issued a warden message advising U.S. citizens of the

curfew, advising adherence, and recommending basic security precautions.

- The evening of June 16, Embassy staff received further reports that local police/military had mistreated individuals at police/military checkpoints around Maseru.
- On the evening of Sunday, June 17, armed and uniformed assailants at what appeared to be an official security checkpoint carjacked a Peace Corps vehicle which was in possession of Lesotho police permits to circulate in Maseru during curfew hours. When regular police personnel approached the checkpoint, a firefight ensued. Two Peace Corps local staff, a driver and PCV training center cook, escaped unharmed.

13. (C) The EAC reviewed the above information and agreed that there was no information to suggest that USG interests, to include USG personnel or U.S. citizens, were the target, directly or indirectly, of any hostile intentions. In light of the overall security developments, however, the EAC agreed to take the following actions:

- To permit all local staff to leave mission offices at 4:30 p.m. during the curfew (normal business hours end at 5:00 p.m.), and allow earlier departure for local staff with long commutes;
- To explore possible deferment of travel to Lesotho by non-essential visitors;
- To release an additional security notice and warden message to update those sent to Embassy staff and U.S. citizens on Friday, June 15, and Saturday, June 16;
- To request police permits for key personnel;
- To cease all non-emergency activities and operations during curfew hours, regardless of ability to obtain police permits for circulation;
- To review and update post's phone tree;
- To review roles of EAC members.

2:00 p.m. Emergency Action Committee Meeting

14. (C) Following a mid-morning meeting with GOL representatives, including the Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) and Foreign Affairs

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Minister (ref A), Charge called a second EAC meeting on June 18 to review additional information. This meeting was attended by Charge, Peace Corps Director, Peace Corps Regional Security Officer, GSO (acting PSO), Consul, P/DEP Officer, and IMO. Charge reported that, according to the DPM, the GOL now assessed that the armed attacks were not isolated criminal activity but rather "the work of renegade Lesotho police and military individuals who want to overthrow the government." The EAC discussed the following new information:

- Instead of the curfew aiding the GOL to reign in illegal weapons, attackers had engaged GOL security teams in gun battles in northern Maseru on June 17, seizing an seven automatic rifles and official vehicles.
- Lesotho military soldiers shot and seriously wounded a senior police inspector (possibly Lesotho's Assistant Commissioner for Police Operations) and stole his car in a June 17 attack at a checkpoint in southern Maseru.
- The GOL was not fully responsive to requests by diplomats to provide permits or other means to respond to medical or security emergencies during curfew hours.
- Mission and other diplomatic personnel reporting hearing nighttime gunfire throughout the weekend of June 16-17;
- Several local hotels reported difficulty in getting staff in place during curfew hours, and as a result were unable to serve meals.
- Several diplomatic missions reported an inability to get to or from the airport during curfew hours (Note: There are no scheduled flights after 6:00 p.m., although delays are frequent and occasionally bring arrivals to Maseru after 6:00 p.m.)

15. (C) Embassy Maseru's EAC concluded that, in light of the new

information, several tripwires regarding local violence and transportation had been at least partially crossed. Authorities gave diplomatic missions assurances on June 18 of GOL responsibilities for the protection of missions and personnel, and stated that the curfew applies only to the capital city of Maseru. The EAC assesses, however, that the GOL's ability to respond to a U.S. mission emergency has diminished considerably during the current security challenges. Further, based on poor discipline and communication within the GOL and its security entities, the EAC will operate on the basis that the curfew applies nationwide. After reviewing the "Actions to Consider" in post's tripwires, the EAC resolved to take the following additional measures:

- To enact an immediate suspension of all non-essential USG and USG NGO partner travel to Lesotho;
- To consult with Consular Affairs (CA) on the possible release of a public announcement on Lesotho's security situation;
- To review air and ground transportation options in the event of a mission drawdown;
- To move a portion of post's emergency food and water supply to a centrally located alternative command center (Management Officer's residence);
- IMO to conduct unannounced radio checks during curfew hours and A/PSO to conduct drills during business hours;
- To identify alternative contacts at the American International School of Lesotho during the current "winter school" mini-session;
- To contact RMO and other health professionals to inform them of the security situation in Lesotho;
- To consult with RSO (resident in Gaborone) to reiterate the possible need for on-site DS support in the event of further security deterioration;
- Peace Corps will review possible options for relocating PC trainees, who arrived in country on June 15-16, out of Maseru to an alternative training site outside of the city;
- Charge and PSO briefed Embassy staff on June 18 regarding recent developments and adjustments to the mission's security and operational postures. PC management did the same for PC staff.

16. (U) Post has received no reports of resident or visiting Amcits encountering serious security difficulties. Our warden messages have been widely read and circulated, and by all accounts Amcits are adhering to the curfew and taking mission security advice seriously.

17. (U) Post communication is normal at present. Local PTT, including landline and cellular networks, are functioning. The Embassy switchboard number is (+266) 22 312 666. Duty Officer phone is (+266) 5888 4035.

MURPHY